

at the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ), says that in his experience it is “rare to see the common good having the highest value,” especially in Israel where “the playing field among denominations is not level at all.”

“When I am right and you are wrong, how can there be diversity?” Oseran asks. “You have to allow for more than one way to be right in order to respect diversity.”

Shaked disagrees, saying that unity and friendship have little to do with accepting others’ opinions or hoping to change them.

“It’s naive to think that anyone will change his or her mind,” she says, and it has more to do with a belief that people can become friends in spite of differences in levels of religious observance.

“It is very easy to rip apart the other. It is very difficult to look for the positive,” Shaked says.

“Irrespective of which religious background you come from, you have to ask yourself: Do I look to build bridges or do I look to inflame?”

This has been Marne Rochester’s modus operandi. An active Conservative Jew, Rochester moved to Israel 26 years ago. In the Jewish state, she maintains her Conservative identity while sending her daughter to a religious school and praying at a variety of different synagogues. She is most active in a Jerusalem Masorti (the Hebrew term for Conservative) congregation, but she also attends a Sephardic, egalitarian minyan.

“I think Conservative and Orthodox, and Conservative and Reform have a lot in common,” says Rochester. “Both the Orthodox and Conservative movements are *halachic* [Jewish law] movements. We just see the interpretation more liberally than the Orthodox.”

When it comes to daily life, she says it’s easy to get along — especially in Israel where Conservative congregants tend to follow more of the movement’s code of conduct, as opposed to the U.S., where “a lot of people who belong to Conservative shuls don’t necessarily go by what the movement says.” Rochester has Orthodox friends willing to eat in her home and share Shabbat together with her.

But Rochester, who takes part in monthly Women of the Wall ceremonies at the Kotel, says the biggest differentiator between the Orthodox and the Conservative, however, is the role of women in public Judaism and the synagogue. While in Orthodox Judaism women take a back seat to men in religious life, “since my bat mitzvah, I read

from the Torah, lead services, put on a tallit and tefillin,” she notes.

“But I feel like in my neighborhood we all get along. We all respect each other and don’t check each other’s tzitzit,” she says.

Rochester notes, also, that Women of the Wall was founded as a minyan of women from different movements coming together on common ground for Rosh Chodesh. While it has become a major media focus and a point of divisiveness between Jews in the diaspora, in Israel, at its core, “You have Orthodox, Reform and Conservative women all together — that is such a powerful, beautiful thing.”

Oseran says he wishes he would see more leaders taking a stance in the direction of unity.

“I am not optimistic from the top down,” he says, but admits positive steps are percolating on a grassroots level.

“There are many Orthodox Jews who understand there is more than one way to be Jewish and are prepared to bridge some of the differences in order to be stronger together,” adds Oseran, noting that Israelis could learn a lot from the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) movement, which is built on a sense of a collective Jewish community in which any Jewish people can fit and find their place.

“How do you create a building bridges mindset?” Shaked asks. “Take the time to make yourself available to talk to others. Be open to meeting people. ... we all have to take the plunge.”

She also recommends celebrating the successes of others and volunteering in communities different from your own.

Harkening back to the unity established by the Bloods and Crips in the wake of the Baltimore riots in 2015, Shaked says she read a study published more than 20 years ago by the Simon Wiesenthal Center that found gang members cannot unify by simply learning about one another through movies, being told positive messages about one another or even through dialogue. Rather, they need to work together on a common project. By working for a common goal, the Bloods and Crips found unity.

“I ask this Rosh Hashanah to join with all Israelis, with friends of Israel, with the Jewish people everywhere in wishing for a better future,” said Netanyahu in his previous Rosh Hashanah address.

“I believe these friendships can be struck. I have seen it, and I live it,” Shaked said. *



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